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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 6364
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 9088
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE 0007
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 1232
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 2107
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI IMMEDIATE 0077
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0196
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 9671
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 009654

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SUBJECT: A/S BLAKE URGES GSL TO PURSUE RECONCILIATION,
JUSTICE AND PEACE

Classified By: SCA A/S Robert O. Blake, Jr., reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake summoned Sri Lankan Embassy CDA Tissa Wijeratne to his office January 29 to express USG concern about the GSL's handling of the election aftermath. A/S Blake urged that any action by the government against defeated opposition candidate General Fonseka be undertaken within the context of Sri Lankan law, and stressed that media intimidation runs counter to President Rajapaksa's calls for justice and equality of rights. Blake also noted our displeasure with a Sri Lankan news article posted on the Ministry of Defense (MOD) website in which Sri Lanka's UN Permanent Representative falsely accused the United States and the Secretary of State of leading a campaign to influence the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against Sri Lanka. The posting of the article on the MOD website suggests GSL support for the remarks, Blake pointed out. Wijeratne promised to convey our concerns to Colombo. He said Fonseka had freedom of movement and access to the media; maintained that President Rajapaksa was sincere about the need for political reform, including human rights and media freedom; and predicted that post-election tensions would subside in one to two weeks. Ambassador is requested to reiterate USG concerns with senior GSL officials at the earliest opportunity. END SUMMARY.

GENERAL FONSEKA

12. (C) Blake noted to Wijeratne reports of a police raid on Fonseka's campaign office January 29, in which up to 17 clerks and security personnel, along with the office's computers, were taken away, apparently without a search warrant or other apparent legal basis for the raid. Any such action must be taken within the context of Sri Lankan law and its constitution, Blake emphasized. The government, said Blake, just came out of an election, on which the United States had congratulated President Rajapaksa and the Sri Lankan people, but the actions against Fonseka are tarnishing the result. Blake reminded the CDA that upon his election victory, President Rajapaksa stated that he wanted Sri Lanka to be a country known for justice and equality of rights. The government's actions against Fonseka and independent media appear inconsistent with his words. He asked the CDA for additional information on these actions and their legal basis.

MEDIA INTIMIDATION

13. (C) Blake told the CDA that media in Sri Lanka are feeling under greater threat since the election. He noted the January 24 disappearance of Lankaenews analyst (and government critic) Prageeth Eknaligoda, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told our Ambassador is being investigated. He pointed to reports that military personnel and paramilitary forces surrounded the offices of certain independent media outlets. Such actions have an intimidating effect on the media and are of serious concern to us, Blake underlined. Media freedom and the protection of human rights, stressed Blake, are key elements of national reconciliation. Now is the time to live up to President Rajapaksa's words, but it appears that authorities are headed in the wrong direction. The government should take steps to end the harassment and intimidation that many journalists face; now is the time to pursue reconciliation, justice and peace.

U.S. HAS NOT LED EFFORT TO
IMPOSE SANCTIONS ON SRI LANKA

14. (C) Blake passed to the CDA a copy of a Sri Lankan news article, posted on the Ministry of Defense website, in which Sri Lanka's UN Permanent Representative Palitha Kohona is reported to have accused Secretary Clinton and the United

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States of leading a campaign to influence the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against Sri Lanka. The accusation is untrue, and Blake said he hoped the remarks do not reflect official government views. Wijeratne replied that Kohona's remarks were extemporaneous and mis-reported in the news, but Blake reminded him again that the article was posted on the Ministry of Defense website, which suggests government backing.

CDA: "GSL HAS NO INTENTION TO
DO ANYTHING AGAINST FONSEKA"

15. (C) Referring to the alleged presence of Army deserters with Fonseka, Wijeratne said the matter is still under investigation, but sought to assure us that the government had no intention of harming Fonseka. He said Fonseka has freedom of movement and access to the domestic and international media. (NOTE: Asked by deskoff following the meeting, the CDA could not confirm that Fonseka could leave the country. END NOTE.) President Rajapaksa wants to establish a peaceful environment, the CDA said, predicting the atmosphere would calm in one to two weeks. Rajapaksa is cognizant that millions of Sri Lankans expressed their disappointment in him by voting for his opponent, and is serious about the need to improve human rights and media freedom, particularly in the run up to parliamentary elections this spring. Wijeratne reiterated that he would convey U.S. concerns to Colombo and the Sri Lankan Ambassador, who traveled to Sri Lanka for the elections, would provide first-hand reports when he returns to the U.S. the week of February 1.

16. (SBU) Ambassador is requested to reiterate USG concerns with senior GSL officials at the earliest opportunity.
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